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## THE HEBREW PROMETHEUS; OR, THE BOOK OF JOB.

A YOUNG English poet, "dowered with the hate of hate, the scorn of scorn, the love of love," that ever accompanies great genius, wrote a lyrical drama and entitled it: "The Prometheus Unbound." To Shelley, with his consuming passion for liberty, justice, and truth, the old Greek myth of Æschylus offered unbounded attractions. He saw in Prometheus, chained to a rock and suffering torment because he had given the use of fire to man, a splendid picture of the dauntless soul defying every ecclesiastical superstition. In his mad revolt from the grim character of the religious thought of his day he cursed everything that stood for Christianity. Expelled from Oxford for his tract "The Necessity of Atheism," ostracised (and rightly) for his fracture of the moral law, branded as a heretic and atheist, he left England for Italy, there to sing for a few years his own ærial music against all rule and authority, against anything and everything that would chain the spirit of man.

In "Prometheus Unbound," Shelley pours the lava of his denunciation upon the tyrant who thunders from Mount Olympus. His hero is not afraid, but with head erect curses Jupiter, the personification of superstition and bigotry:

Fiend, I defy thee! with a calm, fixed mind,  
All that thou canst inflict I bid thee do;  
Foul tyrant both of gods and humankind,  
One only being shalt thou not subdue.  
Rain, then, thy plagues upon me here,  
Ghastly disease, and frenzying fear;  
And let alternate frost and fire  
Eat into me, and be thine ire,  
Lightning, and cutting hail, and legioned forms  
Of furies, driving by upon the wounding storms!

. . . . .  
Thou who art the God and Lord—  
I curse thee! let a sufferer's curse  
Clasp thee, his torturer, like remorse!

Till thine infinity shall be  
A robe of envenomed agony,  
And thine omnipotence a crown of pain  
To cling like burning gold round thy dissolving brain!

The ancient myth of Prometheus, illumined and transfigured by the genius of Shelley, forms a fitting introduction to the poem of the Book of Job. The resemblances between the god who dared to defy Jupiter and the Arabian sheik who openly defied the orthodoxy of his day are many and striking. Both poems are charged with the spirit of revolt. Job and Prometheus are alike heretics, and yet heresy is vindicated, so that we hear the voice of God commending the words of his servant Job, while to Prometheus comes the vision of a far-off redeemed humanity when Jupiter, the tyrant, shall have fallen and Prometheus and mankind shall have come to their own.

When we commence our study of the book of Job we must, for a proper appreciation of its beauty and charm, understand its literary structure. We open our Bibles, and if we happen to have the Revised Version we shall notice that the book consists of a prologue, with scenes in earth and heaven, a dialogue between Job and his friends, and an epilogue describing the subsequent riches that came to the patriarch. By far the greater part of the book is poetry, and poetry of the noblest kind. The Greeks, with their wonderfully clear thinking and grasp of details, characteristics which make their definitions in literary matters finalities, divided all poetry into three kinds: the dramatic, the lyric, and the epic. Under which head does the book of Job come?

We have here a difference of opinion among scholars, a difference arising from the fact that it is not always easy to classify the books of the Bible as we can, for example, the works of English literature. The Jews were careless for the most part of literary form. The thought, independent of its expression, was important, and everything else was secondary.

Thus we have Delitzsch calling the book of Job "a drama, and in the narrower sense a tragedy. . . . There is no

interchange of action, nor contest with the fist or sword; yet there is a contest of thoughts and words. The book is distinguished by its full and clear outlines of character. . . . The book of Job was not intended for the stage; for the Jews got the theater for the first time at a much later period from the Greeks and Romans, and dramatic representations were out of accord with the spirit of the Jewish religion. But a drama is possible without a stage." On the other hand, Prof. Genung, in his charming "Commentary," calls it "The Epic of the Inner Life." "I use the term epic," he writes, "because, whatever its technical type, the poem is the embodiment of a veritable epos, of a history which, whether real or invented, lies at the very basis of pure religion, full of significance for its integrity and perpetuity." "We know also," he continues, "that no other nations have ever approached the Hebrews in their genius for apprehending spiritual truth. If the Hebrews were to give to the world an epic, would it be a story of battle and bloodshed, or of strange adventures beyond the seas? These by no means represent their national character. For the most genuine expression of their life you must look under the surface, in the soul, where worship and aspiration and prophetic faith come face to face with God." Finally, there is Professor Moulton, a scholar who has done more than anybody else to make us appreciate the great literary value of the Bible, designating it "A Dramatic Poem Framed in an Epic Story." With some diffidence, to help us understand its literary structure, I should call it a lyrical drama, with a prologue and an epilogue in prose.

After settling as far as we can its literary form, we next pass to the question of its essential character. What department of Jewish thought does it belong to? Fortunately, here we have no difficulty. It belongs to the wisdom literature of the Jewish people. Specimens of this class of writing in the Old Testament are Proverbs, Ecclesiastes, and Job. If we take in the Apocrypha, as unquestionably we should, there are two more: the Wisdom of Solomon and Ecclesiasticus.

This wisdom literature is the philosophical literature of the Hebrew race. The Jews had no system of philosophy as had the Greeks. Their speculations about God, nature, and man are crystallized in the books already referred to. In Proverbs, the wisdom so earnestly advocated is simply "wise conduct with an ordered universe to adore;" in Ecclesiastes, the field of reflection has widened, with the result that the analysis of the universe is declared to be insoluble; in the book of Job, the consummate flower of wisdom literature, we see Hebrew philosophy in a dramatic form. The problem of human suffering and a righteous God is fearlessly and boldly discussed. Job, the hero of the poem, does not hesitate to attack and denounce the orthodoxy of his friends when they tell him that his unparalleled sufferings are the result of his own sin. He knows better. He has not sinned, and yet calamities above measure have fallen upon his devoted head. What does it all mean? This mystery of human suffering with the postulate of a righteous God is, to use a modern word, the *motif* of the drama.

I do not propose indulging in questions as to the date or authorship of the Book of Job. These things may be, and doubtless are, interesting to the exegete and the historical critic, but for the enjoyment of the book as literature they need not exist. This is one of the reasons why people have avoided reading their Bibles for literary pleasure. Ten thousand times ten thousand books have been written about the Old Testament; critics, old and new, have raised such a hubbub about the meaning of this or that particular passage that the average Bible reader is deafened with their conflicting cries. The lover of good literature stands appalled at the amount of exegetical labor. In addition, allegorical interpretation, run mad, steps in and proceeds to enlighten him with explanations that are frequently an insult not only to his religious feelings, but to his common sense as well. The result is that he leaves his Bible, especially his Old Testament, unread. Nor is the Bible the only work to suffer in this way. Shakespeare has almost been drowned by the flood of books about him. There is now a great Shakespearean

library that would take a man the better part of a lifetime to wade through before coming to the works of the master himself. As a modern writer has declared, this enormous accumulation of books about Shakespeare is not far from being a curse. If it holds true of Shakespeare, it is even more true of the books of the Bible. My object in this simple and untechnical essay, then, is to let the book of Job interpret itself. Its poetry will easily plead its own cause.

The prologue begins as a story whose atmosphere carries us back to the time of the patriarchs: to Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob; to the large life of the desert, with its gracious hospitality, its freedom, its courage, and its simple faith.

There was a man in the land of Uz, whose name was Job; and that man was perfect and upright, and one that feared God, and eschewed evil.

We are told of Job's affluence: thousands of sheep, camels, asses, and oxen, so that he was reckoned "the greatest of all the children of the east." There are born to this cattle king seven sons and seven daughters, and we see the brothers and sisters enjoying each other's society on their respective birthdays. For fear that in these merrymakings his children may have committed sin, Job solemnly sanctifies every son after each feast and offers up burnt offerings.

The scene of the story now changes to the courts of High Heaven. Before a great throne the sons of God present themselves to give an account of their various works. Among them is Satan, though the original word is something entirely different. The Revised Version helps us to understand this part of the story by placing the true reading, "The Adversary," in the margin. He is not the Satan of theology; rather is he the critic, with a strong vein of cynicism, an examiner, an inspector of the children of men. It is easy, of course, as Prof. Moulton points out, to see "how such a title as 'The Adversary' should pass over to form the name of an individual—the adversary of God, Satan the prince of evil." This much must be said if we are to understand the Adversary of the prologue. He is one of the

Sons of God, and in his mocking cynicism is the model of Goethe's Mephistopheles.

Now there was a day when the sons of God came to present themselves before the Lord, and the Adversary came also among them.

And the Lord said unto the Adversary, "Whence comest thou?"

Then the Adversary answered the Lord and said, "From going to and fro in the earth and from walking up and down in it."

And the Lord said unto the Adversary, "Hast thou considered my servant Job? For there is none like him in the earth, a perfect and an upright man, one that feareth God, and escheweth evil?"

Then the Adversary answered the Lord and said, "Doth Job fear God for naught? Hast thou not made an hedge about him and about his house, and about all that he hath, on every side? Thou hast blessed the work of his hands and his substance is increased in the land. But put forth thine hand now and touch all that he hath and he will renounce thee to thy face!"

In these words we hear the biting laugh of the Gentleman in Red. Job is good because he has found that honesty is the best policy, and that it pays to be righteous.

Jehovah, to test his servant, allows the Adversary to overwhelm Job with every conceivable woe. His oxen and asses are carried off by the Sabeans, his sheep and his shepherds are struck by lightning, his camels and his servants are the spoil of the Chaldeans; and finally his children, in an hour of festivity and joy, are all killed by a cyclone from the desert. After such a succession of unparalleled misfortunes we read:

Then Job arose, and rent his mantle, and shaved his head, and fell down upon the ground, and worshiped; and he said:

"Naked came I out of my mother's womb,  
And naked shall I return thither.  
The Lord gave and the Lord hath taken away;  
Blessed be the name of the Lord!"

Once more we are introduced to the heavenly world.

Again comes a day when all the sons of God are arraigned before his throne. Among them appears the Adversary, who is once more questioned by Jehovah concerning Job. So far he has stood the test; "he still holdeth fast his integrity, although thou movedest me against him, to destroy him without cause."

The Adversary, however, is immediately ready with an answer:

"Skin for skin, yea, all that a man hath will he give for his life. Put forth thine hand now, and touch him his bone and his flesh, and he will renounce thee to thy face!"

And the Lord said unto the Adversary, "Behold, he is in thine hand; only spare his life."

Job is then smitten with a loathsome physical disease, with sore boils from the sole of his foot unto his crown.

Then said his wife unto him: "Dost thou still hold fast thine integrity? renounce God and die."

But he said unto her: "Thou speakest as one of the foolish women speaketh. What? shall we receive good at the hand of God, and shall we not receive evil?"

As word of Job's appalling calamities gets noised abroad, it finally reaches the ears of his three friends: Eliphaz the Temanite, Bildad the Shuhite, and Zophar the Naamathite. They make an appointment with each other to come and bemoan with the sorely stricken sufferer. So terrible are the ravages of disease that they scarcely recognize him. Lifting up their voices in lamentation and rending each one his mantle, they sit down upon the ground seven days and seven nights, and "none spake a word unto him: for they saw that his grief was very great."

This ends the prologue, and we now commence what we may call the drama. The *dramatis personæ* are Job, Eliphaz, Bildad, Zophar, Elihu (a young man who appears near the close), and a voice out of the whirlwind. There might also appear, as suggested by Professor Moulton, spectators, who, mute in the presence of such unequaled misery, would appropriately fill in the background. The scene is an ash mound outside an Arabian village.

Suddenly from the lips of the patient sufferer issues a wail of despair that for passion and intensity has no rivals. It is a solemn curse upon the day in which he was born:

"Let the day perish wherein I was born;  
And the night which said, There is a man child conceived!  
Let that day be darkness;  
Let not God regard it from above,  
Neither let the light shine upon it.  
Let darkness and the shadow of death claim it for their own;



Let a cloud dwell upon it.  
 Let all that maketh black the day terrify it.  
 . . . . .  
 Wherefore is light given to him that is in misery,  
 And life unto the bitter in soul?  
 Which long for death, but it cometh not,  
 And dig for it more than hid treasures,  
 Which rejoice exceedingly  
 And are glad when they can find the grave."

This speech of Job unlocks the lips of his friends, and the debate begins which lasts to the interposition of Elihu in the thirty-second chapter.

Eliphaz commences with great tenderness and feeling. He has a difficult task to perform. As a representative of the orthodox thinking of his day he must convey to Job the truth that though outwardly he has been without fear or reproach, inwardly he has been a sinner:

"If one assay to commune with thee, wilt thou be grieved?  
 But who can withhold himself from speaking?  
 Behold, thou hast instructed many,  
 And thou hast strengthened the weak hands.  
 Thy words have upholden him that was falling,  
 And thou hast confirmed the feeble knees.  
 But now it is come unto thee, and thou faintest;  
 It touches thee, and thou art troubled."

Eliphaz proceeds to show that all suffering is a judgment for sin:

"Remember, I pray thee, who ever perished, being innocent;  
 Or where were the upright cut off?"

Nevertheless, he holds out hope for Job. The gate of penitence opens a way of escape:

"Behold, happy is the man whom God correcteth;  
 Therefore, despise not thou the chastening of the Almighty!  
 . . . . .  
 He shall deliver thee in six troubles;  
 Yea, in seven there shall no evil touch thee.  
 In famine he shall redeem thee from death;  
 And in war from the power of the sword.  
 Thou shalt be hid from the scourge of the tongue;  
 Neither shalt thou be afraid of destruction when it cometh.  
 At destruction and death thou shalt laugh;  
 Neither shalt thou be afraid of the beasts of the earth.  
 . . . . .

And thou shalt know that thy tent is in peace;  
And thou shalt visit thy fold and shalt miss nothing.  
Thou shalt know also that thy seed shall be great,  
And thine offspring as the grass of the earth.  
Thou shalt come to thy grave in a full age,  
Like as a shock of corn cometh in its season.  
Lo this, we have searched it, so it is;  
Hear it, and know thou it for thy good!"

Like Prometheus on the rock, Job sadly replies: "The arrows of the Almighty are within me." He also expresses disappointment that his friends should rebuke him for what he has not done, instead of comforting him in his undeserved calamity.

Bildad, the second of the friends, reiterates the argument of Eliphaz that Job must have been a monumental sinner to have brought upon himself such monumental suffering. However, there is hope through repentance:

"God will not cast away a perfect man,  
Neither will he uphold the evil doers.  
He will yet fill thy mouth with laughter,  
And thy lips with shouting."

Job replies in a wail of despair as he realizes the hopelessness of presenting his cause before Omnipotence. How can man, in his puny strength, contend with Him

"Who removeth the mountains and they know it not,  
When he overturneth them in his anger.  
Who shaketh the earth out of her place,  
And the pillars thereof tremble.  
Who commandeth the sun and it riseth not,  
And sealeth up the stars.  
Who alone stretcheth out the heavens,  
And treadeth upon the waves of the sea.  
Who maketh the Bear, Orion, and the Pleiades,  
And the chambers of the south."

Job goes on with a boldness that to many timid, pious souls might seem little short of blasphemy. It is the splendid and immortal challenge of the creature against the seeming injustice of the Creator. The lies of orthodoxy are swept aside as he shows that apparently God laughs at the calamities of the innocent as he allows the earth to be given over into the hands of the wicked. Could any words be more

startling than the stricken leper's passionate plea to the Almighty himself?

"Is it good unto thee that thou shouldest oppress;  
That thou shouldest despise the work of thine hands?  
And shine upon the counsel of the wicked?"

And Job concludes his speech with the same thought of the curse: may death come quickly!

"Are not my days few?  
Cease then, and let me alone,  
That I may take comfort a little,  
Before I go whence I shall not return.  
Even to the land of darkness and of the shadow of death,  
A land of thick darkness, as darkness itself;  
A land of the shadow of death, without any order;  
And where the light is as darkness!"

Zophar, the last of the friends, now takes up the cudgels for orthodoxy, and we note a certain roughness and harshness in his treatment of Job. He stands forth a perfect specimen of bigotry and intolerance. Nevertheless we forgive him as he rises to one of the supreme heights of poetic passion in the book as he denounces the presumption of the man of Uz.

"Should not the multitude of words be answered?  
And should a man full of talk be justified?  
Shouldest thy boastings make men hold their peace?  
And when thou mockest, shall no man make thee ashamed?  
. . . . .  
Know, therefore, that God exacteth of thee  
Less than thine iniquity deserveth!"

Then in an apostrophe which has few rivals he adds:

Canst thou by searching find out God?  
Canst thou find out the Almighty unto perfection?  
It is high as heaven;  
What canst thou do?  
Deeper than Sheol;  
What canst thou know?  
The measure thereof is longer than the earth,  
And broader than the sea!"

Job answers with a sarcastic reference to his critics' great wisdom and their profound acquaintance with the facts of life:

"No doubt but ye are the people,  
And wisdom shall die with you.  
But I have understanding as well as you;  
I am not inferior to you!"

How do you square your doctrine, he continues, with these well-known facts?

"The tents of the robbers prosper,  
And they that provoke God are secure?"

In a burst of indignation at the pious friends speaking unrighteously for God, he adds:

"Ye are forgers of lies,  
Ye are physicians of no value.  
. . . . .  
Your memorable sayings are proverbs of ashes,  
Your defenses are defenses of clay!"

This concludes the first cycle of speeches. Three times have the friends spoken, and three times has Job answered. The second cycle carries on the same argument of the friends, with the same indignant denial by Job. Human suffering is infallibly the penalty of sin. Job is suffering unexampled miseries, therefore he must be a sinner above measure. It is perfectly plain to the friends, and their original sympathy soon passes into rage against the man who flatly denies their conclusions. All the disputants in this second cycle of speeches become impassioned and speak with intense feeling. In a climax of passion, Job, in one of the most famous passages in the book, turns from man and appeals to God:

"O that my words were written now!  
O that they were inscribed in a book!  
That with an iron pen and lead  
They were graven in the rock forever!  
For I know that my Vindicator liveth  
And that he shall stand up at the last upon the earth;  
And after my skin has thus been destroyed,  
Yet without my flesh I shall see God!  
Whom I shall see on my side,  
And mine eyes shall behold and not another!"

Zophar replies to this passionate plea with a rasping on the same old saw:

"Knowest thou not this of old time,  
 Since man was placed upon earth,  
 That the triumphing of the wicked is short,  
 And the joy of the godless but for a moment?"

Job sadly answers—though three times interrupted by the friends—by a simple reference to everyday experience:

"How oft is it that the lamp of the wicked is put out?  
 That their calamity cometh upon them?  
 That God distributeth sorrows in his anger?  
 That they are as stubble before the wind,  
 And as chaff that the storm carrieth away?  
 . . . . .  
 How then comfort ye me in vain,  
 Seeing in your answers there remaineth only falsehood?"

A third round of speeches follows, and Zophar sums up the argument of the friends. Then Job arises and solemnly calls God to witness that he is innocent, imprecating upon himself every possible curse if he has not spoken the truth. This picture that the suffering patriarch draws of himself shows conclusively that he could wear "without reproach the grand old name of gentleman." Professor Moulton, in his simply invaluable edition of the Book of Job, calls it "The Oath of Clearing."

At this point a new speaker appears on the scene, Elihu the Buzite, of the family of Ram. He is a young man, and has hitherto kept silence before his elders. But as Job and his friends cease speaking he believes his time has come. He is furiously indignant with Job "because he justified himself rather than God," and also with his three friends because they had found no answer and yet had condemned Job. He begins modestly enough:

"I am young,  
 And ye are very old:  
 Wherefore I held back,  
 And durst not show mine opinion.  
 I said days should speak,  
 And multitude of years should teach wisdom.  
 But there is a spirit in man,  
 And the breath of the Almighty giveth them understanding.  
 It is not the great that are wise,  
 Nor the aged that understand judgment.

Therefore I say hearken to me;  
I also will show mine opinion—”

and Elihu's speech continues through six chapters. He pauses now and again and looks at Job and his three friends, but they answer him never a word and continue to sit in stony silence. This is distinctly disconcerting, especially to a young man, and to cover his embarrassment he points to the sky, which is showing evidence of an approaching thunder storm.

As we read through the long speech of Elihu we find the young champion of orthodoxy only going over the same ground as the friends, with possibly this addition: that “suffering is judgment warning the sinner to escape from heavier judgment.” There is also a certain grim humor about the way the author treats Elihu. He makes him begin with profound apologies for his youth; but as he is only met with contemptuous silence, he waxes indignant and roundly denounces not only Job but his three friends as well. He begins smoothly and with a pride that apes humility; but toward the end of his long speech he becomes confused, stammers, and finally admits that his boasted wisdom is not far from foolishness. The contrast between the silent courage of Job, the heretic, and the terror of the dogmatic theologian, Elihu, as he realizes that his finely woven theories are inadequate to explain everything in heaven and earth, is striking and suggestive.

As the son of Barachel ceases speaking the storm bursts. The scene is enveloped with thick clouds pierced now and again by flashes of lightning. At last, peeling out of the whirlwind, comes a voice which dismisses in a breath the platitudes of Elihu and the friends and then proceeds to sing of the glories of nature in beauty and sublimity. The fathomless energy, the limitless strength, the all-pervasive sympathy constitute the Creator's joy in his own creation!

“Where wast thou when I laid the foundations of the earth?  
Declare if thou hast understanding.  
Who determined the measures thereof, if thou knowest?  
Or who stretched the line upon it?

Whereupon were the foundations thereof fastened?  
Or who laid the corner stone thereof;  
When the morning stars sang together,  
And all the sons of God shouted for joy?"

The voice out of the whirlwind marks the finale of the drama. Job listens, spellbound, to the wonders of creation, and when it is all over, can only stammer forth:

"I know that thou canst do all things  
And that no purpose of thine can be restrained—  
I had heard of thee by the hearing of the ear;  
But now mine eye seeth thee;  
Wherefore I abhor myself and repent in dust and ashes."

Job, like a kindred spirit in later times, can only regard the creation as "an unspeakable, godlike thing, toward which the best attitude for us, after never so much science, is awe, devout prostration, and humility of soul—worship, if not in words, then in silence."

Job is thus answered, though in a way he did not expect. Notwithstanding the solution of the mystery is unexplained, still to the sorely tried patriarch there comes a peace as he contemplates the unapproachable power and beauty of the natural world. A divine wisdom is at the bottom of it all. The distance between God and man is infinite. The part of human wisdom is to accept undeserved suffering, if it comes, as a part of some infinite purpose that is wholly beyond his comprehension. God's ways are inscrutable; man's duty is to bend the knee in lowly abasement and awe.

The epilogue which follows, like the prologue, is in prose. It tells how Job once more regained his health and became great and prosperous. "The Lord gave Job twice as much as he had before." At his death he had seven sons and three daughters, and thousands upon thousands of sheep, oxen, camels, and asses. But by far the most interesting part of the epilogue is the fact that God commends Job's fearless challenge of the divine justice, while his three friends are severely rebuked for their trying to distort the facts of life to explain his providence—Elihu the Buzite, of the family of Ram, is not even mentioned. In other words, man will never

win God's approval by lying for him. This test of loyalty he does not want. Job's bold appeal to God against the justice of God's own visitation is more acceptable to him than the servile adoration of the friends who have sought to "twist the truth in order to magnify God."

One may go through the study of the book of Job and yet find that the great mystery of human suffering remains still unanswered. The great contribution that the book of Job makes to the insoluble mystery is this: all suffering is not punishment for sin. Yet this had been an axiom of theological thinking before Job had dared to challenge it! In the strong language of Carlyle, the prophet of Chelsea: "One feels indeed as if it were not Hebrew; such a noble universality, different from noble patriotism or sectarianism, dwells in it. A noble book; all men's book! It is our first, oldest statement of the never-ending problem of man's destiny, and God's ways with him here on this earth. And all in such free, flowing outlines; grand in its sincerity, in its simplicity, in its epic melody, and repose of reconciliation. There is the seeing eye, the mildly understanding heart. So true every way; true insight and vision for all things, material things no less than spiritual; the horse—hast thou clothed his neck with thunder? He laughs at the shaking of the spear! Such living likenesses were never drawn. Sublime sorrow, sublime reconciliation; oldest choral melody as of the heart of mankind—so soft and great; as the summer midnight, as the world with its seas and stars!"

GEORGE DOWNING SPARKS.